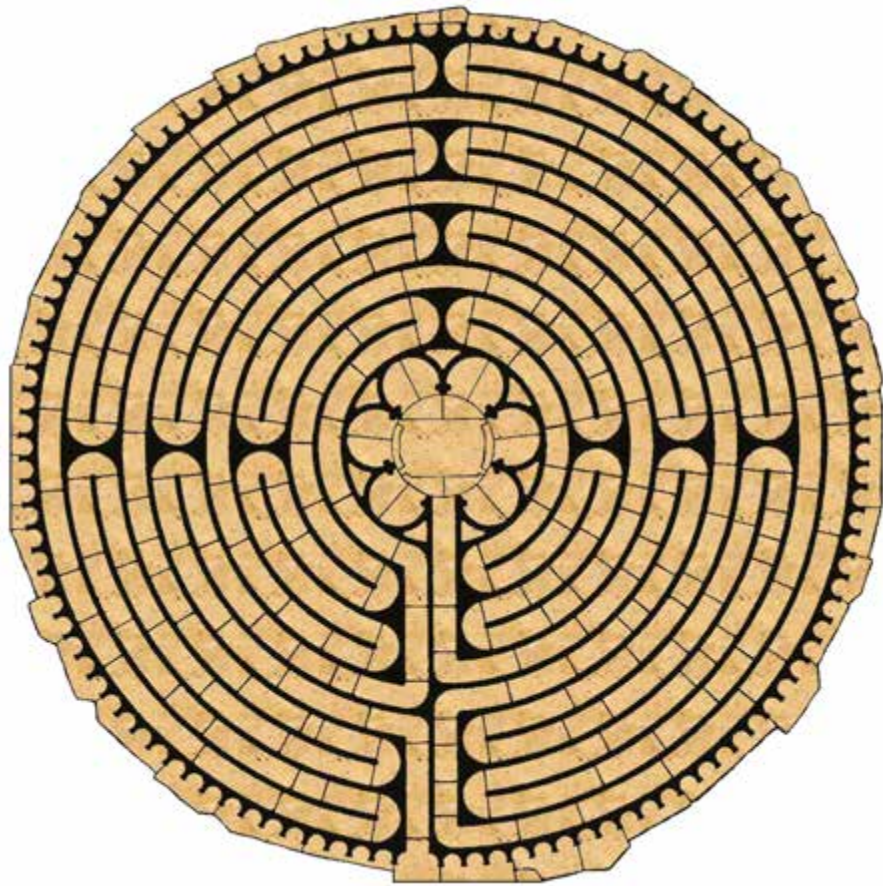


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Special Issue: Early Modernity in Arizona State University

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Pornographic Sensibilities. Imagining Sex and the Visceral in Premodern and Early Modern Spanish Cultural Production. Nicholas R. Jones and Chad Leahy, eds.
New York: Routledge, 2021. 269 pp. ISBN 978-0-367-50353-6.

Porn Studies, the academic study of what has been labeled pornography and pornographic representations, hold a rightful and valuable place in academia alongside other studies that analyze the literature of late medieval and early modern Iberia. While some scholars would argue that they do not, editors Nicholas R. Jones and Chad Leahy, along with the contributing authors of this edited volume, emphasize that they absolutely do. Despite recent gains made by Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Queer and Feminist Studies, among others, regarding how academia examines graphic literary representations of the body, there exists a markedly disjointed opinion as to how such representations should be phrased (1). This volume addresses a fundamental goal within Porn Studies itself: “to place the category of obscenely fleshed iconography at the center of inquiry and to provide answers to how ‘pornography,’ as a mode both of representation and of critique, affects and has been affected by various social, political, and cultural institutions” (3). Resulting “pornographic sensibilities,” made patent in the title, effectively expand this goal by defining how medieval and early modern scholars may continue to sensibly study such iconography.

By positing that Medieval and Early Modern Iberian studies are inseparable from Porn Studies when considering “the material and the political” (2), the authors cast a wide net designed to illustrate how Porn Studies complement other ongoing gender, sexuality, and erotic studies in academia. This can only begin with self-reflection, specifically regarding how our own gaze as scholars falls upon the literary or figurative iconography of the obscene. The proffered concept of pornographic sensibilities therefore is inclusive, inviting structured, interdisciplinary analyses shared between art history, medieval and early modern literature, anthropology, sociology, history, and gender and sexuality studies, among others. These disciplines are currently limited by decidedly “disparate” approximations towards pornographic or obscene iconography that center on its “content,” rather than inspiring an “argument” for the existence and revelation of a natural and visceral culture of sex (6).

Pornographic Sensibilities. Imagining Sex and the Visceral in Premodern and Early Modern Spanish Cultural Production. Nicholas R. Jones and Chad Leahy, eds.
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This volume engages the reader by presenting the concept of how pornography is situated firmly within the relationship between text and reader, formulating an academic model that does not simply seek to define what pornography is. Such representations of the body already exist within these texts—through conceptual, descriptive, and ekphrastic narratives—and the manner by which we approach them is necessarily problematized and expanded. With the goal of eliminating academia's prudish "pearl clutching" in reaction to such narratives, the authors demonstrate how such content is pedagogically valuable and worthy of study without gasping or invoking pejorative labels (5).

The book is divided into three parts grouped thematically. The first part, "Pornographic Hispanisms: Canon Formation, Erotic Concepts," centers on canonical works from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The authors of this section explore how scholars interact with implicit and explicit language found in these texts. Works analyzed include Juan Ruiz's *Libro de buen amor* (1330), Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina* (1499), Garcilazo de la Vega's sixteenth-century poem "Ode ad florem Gnidi," Baltasar del Alcázar's sixteenth-century epigrams, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605-1615), and the eighteenth-century Spanish Enlightenment poetry of Nicolás Fernández de Moratín, Tomás de Iriarte, and Juan Meléndez Valdés.

The second part, "On the Visceral and Its (Dis)contents," challenges our gaze upon the obscene by moving into the realm of the visual—scopophilia and voyeurism—in relation to works such as Garcilaso's "Con ansia extrema de mirar," De Rojas's *La Celestina*, Francisco de Quevedo's syphilitic baroque poetry, and María de Zayas y Sotomayor's *Los desengañosos*.

The third part, "Haptic Arousals, Titillating the Senses," explores how literature has engaged the senses regarding "wonton desires and visceral carnality" (9). Themes of masturbation, sound, touch, and voyeurism are explored in works by Fernando de Esquio, Pero Garcia Burgalês, Juan Pérez de Montalbán, Fernando de Rojas, Xi Xiang Ji, and eighteenth-century unpublished archives from Mexico City that document a hypersexualization of pornography.

The remarkable articles in Jones and Leahy's volume will be of particular interest to scholars who explore the normalcy of gender,

sexuality, and expressions of the body within medieval and early modern Iberian texts. It will inspire frank and meaningful academic analyses of what has often been considered off-limits, too graphic, or too taboo to study. The volume succeeds in documenting the pedagogical value of studying obscenely fleshed iconography across the disciplines.

Daniel Holcombe
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